



# Department Updates

March 2022

## Finance

**Jodi Busch**  
Finance Director

Spring time is audit time in the Finance Department. In addition to daily duties, staff has been very busy reconciling accounts and closing out 2021. The Highway audit fieldwork by our external auditors, CliftonLarsonAllen, will be conducted the week of March 21. The county-wide audit will commence April 18th.

The Highway audit prep looks a bit different this year. Highway Account Technician, Sally Ellison, will be retiring April 1<sup>st</sup> after 28 years working at Barron County. I am very pleased to announce that Jen Holub has been promoted into the Highway Technician position, so has been training with Sally for several months. They have both been prepping the 2021 financials for the upcoming audit and have done a wonderful job working together, making the transition a smooth one. We wish Sally the very best in her retirement and thank her for her dedication to Barron County over the years.

With the new Highway Facility Construction well under way, to date we have spent about 49% of the \$25,120,000 Bond. This equates to approximately \$12.2 million. Our Financial Advisor, Ehler's and Associates, has been managing our bond investments through the construction process, while the Finance Department has been managing the payments, financials and fixed assets.

Another project keeping us busy is managing the financial activity of the American Rescue Plan Act. Barron County was awarded just over \$8.75 million which needs to be encumbered no later than December 31, 2024 with total spent by December 31, 2026. To date, we have expended \$168,000 on various projects and equipment. While we received the first tranche of the funds almost a year ago, the final guidance only came out in late January and won't go into effect until April 1<sup>st</sup>. We are still working to understand the guidance, reporting, and Federal rules that need to be followed with each project.

## Finance

**John Cisek**  
Forest Administrator

The winter 2021-2022 is wrapping up soon. Harvesting this winter continued to be slow, due to weak markets for pulpwood.

One half of the The Black & White sale, in the Town of Bear Lk. was able to be completed. Completion is expected next winter.

Bids were let for the Historical Museum clearing. One bid was received and accepted by the property committee. Activity is planned to start this spring.

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## Veterans Service Office

**Scott Bachowski**  
**Veterans Service Officer**

**2021 Completed Work** - In 2021, the Veterans Service Office despite the continuing pandemic, processed 149 Department of Veteran Affairs (DVA) Service-Connected disability claims. This is an increase of 13 claims from 2020. Our 2021 Non-Service Connected Disability Pension claims dropped from 21 to 15 in 2021. This is reflective of the number of war-time veterans eligible for this benefit. One of our most impressive accomplishments for 2021 was to provide survivor benefits to 35 surviving spouses. These types of claims are up 50 percent from the previous year. We processed 96 medical eligibility applications, 47 grave marker applications, and 34 burial reimbursement applications. We also registered 96 new county veterans into our database; this is an impressive number of new veterans being exposed to the benefits they have earned. Our workload throughout the pandemic has not dropped off at all; in fact, we are actually up from previous years in certain tasks.

**Board of Veteran Appeals** – With the assistance of the IT Department, we were able to obtain the technology and establish an area within our office to host Board of Veteran Appeals (BVA) hearings. This accomplishment will allow veterans to have their BVA hearings much earlier than waiting for an in-person hearing, usually saving a year or two. It will also allow us to assist the National Service Organizations in presenting evidence and a stronger argument for granting service-connection to the BVA judges in Washington D.C... We are very pleased with the results of the half dozen hearings we have assisted with so far. We have another five scheduled for 2022 with more being scheduled weekly. We have offered our space to surrounding counties to have their BVA hearings closer to their veteran's homes.